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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 001584

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH/FAGAN/STINCHCOMB)

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SUBJECT: EXPANDING BOSNIA,S IRAQ MISSION

Classified By: DCM Judith B. Cefkin Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. Summary: (C) On 18 July, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq Lawrence Butler and OSD Director of Coalition Operations Peter McVety had constructive meetings with Minister of Defense Selmo Cikotic, Chief of Defense LTG Sifet Podzic, and Council of Ministers Chairman Nikola Spiric to discuss Bosnia,s military cooperation in Iraq. They thanked the Bosnian government for its five EOD unit deployments to Iraq and briefed on USG plans associated with Coalition efforts in Iraq. Butler spoke to all three officials about the possibility of changing the nature of Bosnia's role in the Coalition to include expanding the duties of Bosnian troops in Iraq. Security at the UN compound in Baghdad was a need that could match Bosnia's goal of enhancing its military policing capabilities. Expanding the role of the EOD unit to include IED disposal could also develop a valuable niche capability for the Bosnian armed forces, Butler said. Cikotic and Podzic each expressed some level of support for Butler,s proposals while Spiric stressed Bosnia would be in a position to assess possible changes to its coalition presence later in the fall. All three leaders emphasized that expanding and redefining Bosnia,s mission in Iraq would require approval by the Presidency, and most likely, parliamentary approval. END SUMMARY

Mission Expansion Politically Sensitive

12. (C) DAS Butler and Director McVety began each of their meetings with Cikotic, Podzic, and Spiric by thanking each of them for their contributions to Iraq, particularly as Bosnia continues to implement defense reform. Butler highlighted that Iraq is facing many of the same problems as Bosnia has experienced in its post conflict period, emphasizing that Bosnia, therefore, is well-suited to help Iraq through this challenging time. Butler briefed on the growing need for counter-IED capabilities and asked Cikotic and Podzic to consider allowing Bosnian troops in Iraq to undergo training to develop this niche capability. Butler raised the possibility of deploying an additional Bosnian unit (to form all or part of a company size 150-160 soldiers) to Baghdad to provide security for the UN compound in the Green Zone.

13. (C) Cikotic said that morale within the EOD unit is high. He noted that during his last visit to Iraq in May the EOD

unit was clearly committed to its mission, despite the hostile security environment. Cikotic said that he would not oppose augmenting Bosnia's troop presence in Iraq but that such a change would face political opposition. Cikotic said he would argue that Bosnia must demonstrate its readiness for NATO membership by continuing to contribute to coalition operations. Cikotic noted, however, that public support for NATO membership has decreased slightly in both entities, and that Bosnia's EU aspirations continue to present certain complications for cooperation with NATO. Both Cikotic and Butler agreed, nonetheless that the processes are largely complimentary.

14. (C) Spiric said that his government's troop contributions in Iraq are a token of appreciation for all the U.S. has done in Bosnia. Spiric added that Bosnia seeks to continue its role in the coalition, both for the sake of U.S.-Bosnian bilateral cooperation and for its own interests. The defense reform process will improve Bosnia's ability to contribute to this effort. Although Bosnia hopes to comply with all U.S. requests to the extent of its abilities, the government must first assess both the situation on the ground in Iraq, and its own capabilities, before stating its position. He acknowledged that Bosnia's military capabilities are greater than being currently provided by the EOD unit. However, Spiric noted that the situation in Iraq would become clearer in September and Bosnia looked forward to being able to articulate its position at that time.

15. (C) Spiric said that, in addition to military capabilities, Bosnia looked forward to being able to contribute to the reconstruction efforts in Iraq. He noted that after the war in Bosnia, he understood the destruction resulting from conflict and was unhappy to see similar scenes

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in Iraq. For example, after the completion of police reform, Bosnia would be in a position to contribute to law enforcement capabilities in Iraq. In the meantime, however, a comprehensive assessment of the situation in Iraq would allow a decision on whether Bosnia could increase its military contributions. Spiric added that any change in the size or role of the deployment would require approval by the Presidency and, most likely, parliamentary approval.

16. (C) LTG Podzic noted he has daily contact with his liaison officer in Baghdad and is well briefed on the situation in Iraq. Podzic said that although he had previously been cautious in response to U.S. requests to expand Bosnian deployments to Iraq, the nature of the bilateral partnership had changed and he now believed such changes were possible. Podzic told Butler the USG could count on his support for proposals to expand Bosnian participation in coalition operations. However, he stated that such changes would first require political endorsement by political leaders. Nonetheless, Podzic asserted that many politicians, and the general public, understand the need for, and benefits of, expanded Bosnian deployments.

Counter-IED Capabilities

17. (C) Butler explained that acquiring a counter-IED capability would position Bosnia to fill a unique niche capability as a prospective NATO member. He stated that Bosnia would not be required to increase troop numbers and could simply train the existing EOD unit in Iraq. Cikotic replied that this new mission would present new risks and would therefore require evaluation at the political level including approval by the Presidency and the parliament. Moreover, according to Cikotic, there would likely be resistance to the idea within key political parties, including the SDA. Podzic said that he is aware of the mounting IED threat and is well briefed on the issue. He assessed that Bosnia is capable of taking on this additional

responsibility but echoed Cikotic's caveat that a political decision would be needed to expand the mission. Butler encouraged his interlocutors to consider commencing training while politicians are debating the proposal so that units would be prepared to deploy after political approval of the new mission.

UN Protection Unit

¶18. (C) Butler raised the need for a unit to provide security at the UN headquarters building in the Green Zone and urged the Bosnian armed forces to consider filling this need in the next six months. He explained that as a Peace Support Operation this has the advantage of paying UN salaries, yet the unit still comes under the MNF-I chain of command. While recognizing that BiH does not have the troops to deploy for this purpose immediately, he asked that BiH consider it in its future planning. Cikotic responded favorably adding that Bosnia has been considering the deployment of a military police unit to Afghanistan in 2008. He was receptive to the possibility, however, of instead providing security to UNHQ in Baghdad. Cikotic, nonetheless, said that he could not commit to the mission before consulting with the Presidency and the parliament.

Comment

¶19. (C) Cikotic and Podzic were all careful not to make any formal commitments to changing the nature of Bosnia,s engagement in Iraq. Spiric was clearly aware of upcoming USG strategic assessments and signaled that Bosnia would wait to hear the results of those reports before considering changes to its Iraq mission. Podzic took pains to present himself as at the mercy of politicians, explaining that he and Minister Cikotic do not always agree on strategic issues. However, all three leaders accurately pointed out that any change in the Bosnian deployment would require approval from political leaders and members of parliament which would involve public

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debate. End Comment.

¶10. (U) DAS Butler did not have an opportunity to clear this message prior to his departure.
MCELHANEY